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ABSTRACT

The experiences of schools and sixth form and further education colleges in the United Kingdom in implementing Curriculum 2000 in the 18 months since the introduction of Qualifying for Success reforms were tracked. The key issues for implementing the curriculum in 2001-2002 that were identified by 10 case study schools and post-16 institutions were compared against the list of issues they identified a year earlier. The individual institutions identified a variety of key issues. General consensus was expressed regarding the need to accomplish the following objectives: (1) refine and develop the support available to students; (2) ensure the quality of the education experience of learners aged 16-19 years; and (3) raise achievement levels. Other key issues raised included meeting the challenges of introducing General Certificate of Secondary Education qualifications in vocational subjects, meeting the needs of a wider range of students, making greater use of information and computer technology, and increasing cooperation and partnerships between schools and colleges. The 10 institutions wrote case study reports documenting their experiences with Curriculum 2000. Finally, sample profiles of Curriculum 2000 learners were developed and provided along with the findings from student focus groups. The students commented on approaches to the following items: tutoring, enrichment, dropping subjects, progression, and key skills. (MN)

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CURRICULUM 2000+2: tracking institutions' and learners' experiences

Tony Tait
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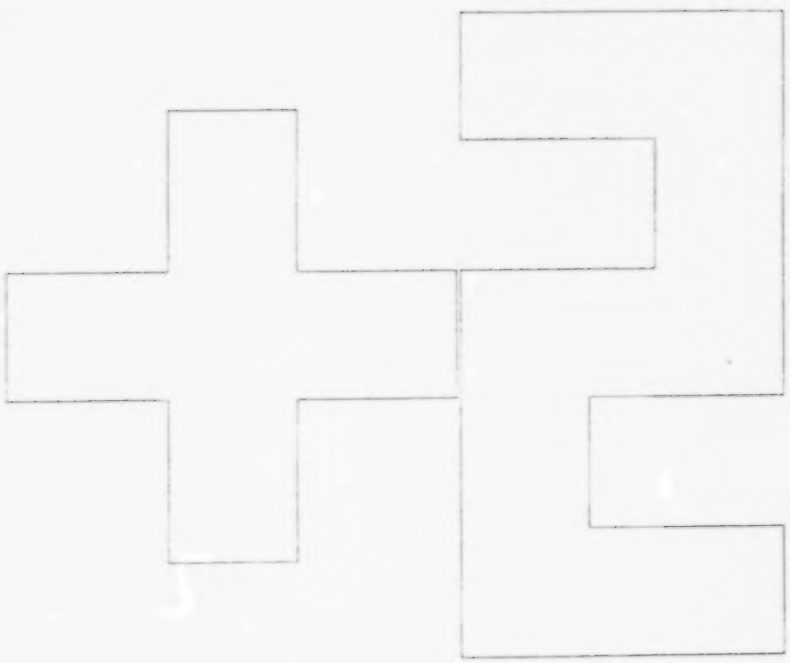

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CURRICULUM 2000+2:
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Contents

Preface	
Introduction	
Summary of key issues	**3**
Curriculum 2000: now and the future	**7**
Case studies	**11**
Carmel College	13
The Castle School	18
Cricklade College	21
Exeter College	25
GLOSCAT	29
Huddersfield New College	33
Rivington and Blackrod High School	35
Tameside College	38
Thomas Alleyne's High School	41
Thurston Community College	44
Learner profiles	**51**
Student focus groups	**57**
References	62

Preface

This publication is a follow up to *Curriculum 2000+1*, published by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) in February 2001. *Curriculum 2000+2* tracks the institutions that contributed to the first book to see how they tackled their key issues for 2000/01 and what they consider to be key issues for 2001/02 now that both lower and upper-sixth students are studying Curriculum 2000 qualifications.

Schools, sixth form and FE colleges have shared their experiences with us. Although the three types of institutions may operate in different contexts and have different missions, many of the issues they raise are common and relevant to all institutions. This book is aimed at senior managers, curriculum managers and teachers. Government agencies, funding bodies, awarding bodies and other agencies interested in the impact of Curriculum 2000 will also find it useful.

Curriculum 2000+2 is split into the following sections:

- a summary of institutions' key issues for 2000/01 and 2001/02
- case-study reports written by 10 institutions, which document their experiences of Curriculum 2000
- sample profiles of Curriculum 2000 learners
- findings from student focus groups
- Curriculum 2000: now and the future.

The Green Paper *14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards* (DfES 2002) sets out the government's vision for post-14 education. The aims of the 14–19 phase are to:

- meet the needs and aspirations of young people
- raise the levels of achievement of all young people and reduce the gap in achievement between various socio-economic and ethnic groups
- broaden the skills acquired by young people and improve their employability
- deliver education through flexible, integrated and innovative networks of providers.

These aims encompass Curriculum 2000, and LSDA believes that the activities described in this publication are showing the way forward in terms of broad, flexible, learner-centred patterns of provision. Another new publication from LSDA, *Curriculum 2000: innovations, opportunity and change* (LSDA 2002) offers further examples of how institutions are responding to the challenges of delivering the new curriculum and qualifications. The book can be downloaded from the Curriculum 2000 website at **www.LSDA.org.uk/curriculum2000**

I would like to thank all the institutions and individuals that contributed to this publication. LSDA will continue to track the institutions and the progress of their learners through to July 2002, when they will have completed their advanced-level programmes. Thanks are also due to the LSDA consultants who worked on this project: David Crabtree, Gillian Frankland, Sharon Moore and David Smith. Over the course of 18 months they have developed excellent relationships with the institutions involved.

If you would like further information about this publication or LSDA's work on Curriculum 2000, please e-mail me at ttait@LSDA.org.uk

Tony Tait
Development Adviser

Introduction

Method

In *Curriculum 2000+1* we reported on how a range of schools, sixth form and FE colleges were preparing to implement Curriculum 2000. The content of the book was informed by case-study reports that LSDA commissioned from over 40 institutions. Each institution was asked to provide information on areas such as:

- strategic plans
- resourcing mechanisms
- timetabling arrangements
- tutorial arrangements for recruitment and selection mechanisms
- marketing strategies
- staff development.

They were also asked to provide:

- a set of key issues for the next 6–12 months
- sample profiles of three students who began their programmes in September 2000
- materials demonstrating innovation and good practice.

Since then LSDA has commissioned more case studies from some of the original institutions to see how they tackled their key issues identified for 2000/01 and what, if any, new issues they had. LSDA also tracked the progress of more than 100 learners (see 'Learner profiles' page 51).

To gain a student perspective of the Curriculum 2000 experience, focus groups were held in six institutions involving more than 60 students. The groups first met in March 2001 and were reconvened in November 2001. Two LSDA consultants met with groups of 6–10 students to gauge their response to the reforms. On each occasion the consultants stressed that everything the students said in the meetings would remain confidential, although an essence of the discussions would be fed back to the institution. In most cases, however, students were keen that consultants fed back their comments as they were given, although references made to individual members of staff remained confidential.

LSDA plans to track the same institutions and students through to July 2002 when the first 2-year, advanced-level programmes will have been completed.

Findings

The first section summarises institutions' key issues for 2000/01 and 2001/02. The case-study reports then show how each institution addressed topics such as:

- Key Skills
- staff development
- student guidance
- raising achievement
- external assessment
- progression.

The section on learner profiles focuses on what qualifications students studied in 2000/01, their level of achievement and their second-year choices. This is followed by a summary of comments from students in the focus groups and a useful discussion of Curriculum 2000.

Participating institutions

LSDA would like to thank the following institutions that supplied material for *Curriculum 2000+2*.

Bishop Burton (agricultural) College
Bradford College
Bridgwater College
Cambridge Regional College
Carmel College
The Castle School
Chelmer Valley High School
Christ the King Sixth Form College
Cricklade College
Eggbuckland Community College
Exeter College
GLOSCAT
Guildford College
Horndean Community College
Huddersfield New College
John Bunyan Upper School
John Leggott Sixth Form College
John Ruskin College
Long Road Sixth Form College
Peterborough Regional College
Rivington and Blackrod High School
Southgate College
Sutton Coldfield College
Tameside College
Thomas Alleyne's High School
Thurston Community College

Summary of key issues

LSDA's publication *Curriculum 2000+1* was based on work carried out with over 40 schools, sixth form and FE colleges. Six months after the reforms were implemented, institutions explained the effects of Curriculum 2000 and how they had introduced initiatives to address issues such as Key Skills, timetabling, progression, combining vocational and academic qualifications, retention and achievement, and student guidance. They also highlighted key issues that they would need to address in the next 6–12 months as they prepared for the second year of Curriculum 2000.

For this follow-up publication, LSDA returned to the case-study institutions to see:

- how they had tackled the key issues they identified for 2000/01
- what they considered to be key issues for 2001/02.

The findings from 10 institutions are summarised in the following table. Each of the institutions featured has produced a case-study report that contains more information on the issues highlighted. Page references for these case studies are given in brackets.

Institution	Key issues for 2000/01	Key issues for 2001/02
Carmel College (page 13)	▫ increasing student achievement ▫ broadening student achievement ▫ educating the whole person ▫ timetabling and accommodation	▫ Key Skills and their role in entitlement ▫ sustaining commitment to the enrichment programme ▫ greater student achievement ▫ changes to vocational courses
The Castle School (page 18)	▫ use of exam data for initial choices ▫ Key Skills introduction and assessment ▫ examination period and mocks ▫ extra-curricular activities and work experience	▫ standards ▫ levels ▫ tests ▫ target setting
Cricklade College (page 21)	▫ Key Skills ▫ staff development in Key Skills ▫ transition from AS to A2 ▫ entry requirements for advanced level	▫ Key Skills ▫ staff development in Key Skills ▫ awarding bodies ▫ internal moderation
Exeter College (page 25)	▫ ongoing guidance for students moving into their second year ▫ Key Skills ▫ the volatility of student decision-making ▫ a new timetable	▫ some student achievement at AS level (summer 2002) and at A2; vocational A-level and diplomas ▫ securing appropriate progression from year one to year two ▫ improved commitment to Key Skills and enrichment ▫ developing 'responsible learning' values in students
GLOSCAT (page 29)	▫ shortage of skilled staff ▫ Key Skills ▫ induction and guidance ▫ examinations	▫ Key Skills ▫ examinations ▫ Level 2 and Level 3 courses ▫ progression

Institution	Key issues for 2000/01	Key issues for 2001/02
Huddersfield New College (page 31)	▫ Key Skills ▫ tutoring ▫ citizenship ▫ resitting GCSE English or Maths alongside advanced programme of study	▫ raising achievement in the A2 cohort ▫ raising achievement at AS level ▫ awarding bodies reporting results in vocational subjects to the centre ▫ Key Skills assessment
Rivington and Blackrod High School (page 35)	▫ Key Skills for all ▫ maintaining enrichment ▫ academic and vocational co-habitation ▫ planning for progression from Year 12 to Year 13	▫ better tracking of Key Skills achievements and exemptions ▫ extending the curriculum to provide more breadth and further participation ▫ managing the examination process ▫ maintaining quality of provision
Tameside College (page 38)	▫ provision of a broader range of diagnostic tests ▫ online student tracking system ▫ increase in number of staff with Key Skills practitioner qualifications ▫ in-house Key Skills training	▫ Key Skills ▫ widely differing levels of difficulty between subjects at AS and A2 ▫ group sizes ▫ examination process and disruption to teaching time
Thomas Alleyne's High School (page 41)	▫ Key Skills ▫ managing January and June examinations ▫ student guidance ▫ advice to students on HE applications	▫ the resit debate ▫ Key Skills ▫ the demise of Intermediate GNVQ post-16 ▫ the standard of vocational A-levels
Thurston Community College (page 44)	▫ tutor periods ▫ advice about new courses ▫ report writing ▫ target grades	▫ enhanced ethos ▫ enrichment ▫ external assessment ▫ teaching styles and assessment

Curriculum 2000: now and the future

Schools and colleges have delivered Curriculum 2000 qualifications for nearly 2 years. In that time the reforms have generated a great deal of public and political interest. Media coverage has been phenomenal but not entirely positive, with reports of high student drop-out rates and over-burdened students. Consequently, there is widespread appreciation that there will be further changes made to the 16–19 curriculum either relating to the availability or design of courses, or driven by new funding mechanisms. Whatever changes are afoot, the institutions that took part in LSDA's research identified the need to:

- refine and develop the support available to students
- ensure the quality of the 16–19 experience
- raise achievement levels.

The introduction of GCSEs in vocational subjects

Although not strictly part of the Curriculum 2000 package, the introduction of GCSEs in vocational subjects (from September 2002) represents another challenge for schools and colleges. These new courses are being promoted by the government to provide initial high-quality, work-related learning opportunities for Key stage 4 and post-16 students. It is hoped that the new GCSEs will become an established part of the qualifications framework and provide progression to the wide range of post-16 vocational and occupational courses that are available.

GCSEs in vocational subjects will have a similar structure to Part One GNVQs. Staff in schools that currently offer Part One GNVQ feel that they will be in a good position to carry forward the momentum from these courses. In other schools, interest in the new GCSEs is partly driven by the growing recognition that increased flexibility at Key stage 4 might motivate and raise the achievement level of a wider group of students.

Meeting the needs of a wider range of students

As institutions plan their future curriculum offers they are looking at the entire post-16 provision available to **all** potential students. This is especially the case in colleges, where staff are conscious of the need to cater for the large number of students for whom advanced-level courses are not appropriate. Offering attractive programmes for students who need to embark on Level 1 and Level 2 programmes before they can consider advanced-level programmes is essential. Even more challenging for curriculum planners is catering for the growing numbers of students who require a 'mixed-level' programme, combining qualifications at Levels 2 and 3. In this way colleges are hoping to be able to offer true individual learning programmes, tailored to the abilities and interests of students.

Another major issue preoccupying many staff is the need to offer attractive options at Levels 1 and 2, given that September 2004 will be the last opportunity for students to begin Intermediate and Foundation GNVQs. Cricklade College is considering offering GCSEs in vocational subjects to strengthen its Level 1 and Level 2 provision.

Staff at Carmel College are increasingly concerned about the suitability of the vocational A-level. Experience to date suggests that the courses are not proving to be as attractive to students as the old GNVQ programmes. Consequently, the college is looking to allow students to take a double award, plus further study support and/or a long-term work placement, or other vocational short-courses – it won't expect every student to follow the equivalent of three advanced-level courses. It is hoping to have the flexibility to enable students who perform well in Year 12 to increase their programme in Year 13, possibly by taking on a new AS level. In this way the staff intend to offer students the chance to build up their skills and expertise, rather than make what is a major and rapid transition from GCSE to advanced level. This, the staff hope, will pay dividends in terms of encouraging progression and enhancing levels of achievement.

Other colleges are hoping to offer similarly attractive packages to potential students. At Exeter College and GLOSCAT, the senior management teams (SMTs) are looking to use a range of diploma courses to broaden the curriculum available. Thurston Community College plans to offer ICT courses at all levels, which any student can take alongside their other courses. At Huddersfield New College staff intend to increase the number of AS options to include subjects such as geology and philosophy. They are also planning to bolster their enrichment provision with citizenship and general studies programmes.

Supporting students

Many institutions are developing policies and systems to provide improved student support. It is generally recognised that, because the reforms offer greater choice through the new and unitised qualifications, students require far more guidance and support than their predecessors.

GLOSCAT plans to offer targeted, subject-specific support programmes for some subjects where staff believe students would benefit. One example is a chemistry for biologists course, as many students taking biology are found not to have sufficient understanding of the aspects of chemistry required for success in A-level Biology.

At Carmel College, staff have already recognised that the transition from AS to A2 is a critical stage for students. Some students, particularly those in Year 12 who are not performing as well as expected, need a good deal of advice and support from a range of agencies independent from the college. The college is looking to see how the various sources of support and advice can be integrated into the existing college systems.

Ensuring quality

All schools and colleges are aware of the need to ensure the quality of the programmes they are offering to students, and thereby retain their students for the duration of their courses. Institutions are responding to this challenge in a number of ways.

At Rivington and Blackrod High School, the SMT is focusing on ways to retain learners and ensure their success. It is looking to students to be part of that process. Using questionnaires, focus groups, student councils, data analysis and regular student reviews, the staff hope to gain valuable feedback from their students and use it to improve the teaching and learning offered.

The SMT at Cricklade College has decided to create four new posts to help improve the quality and responsiveness of the curriculum to the needs of the student population. The new 'learning director' posts are intended to provide 'champions' in areas such as:

- the 14–19 curriculum
- enrichment
- Key Skills (IT, Application of Number and Communication)
- the wider Key Skills.

There will also be other 'advanced practitioner' roles to coordinate the work of clusters of programmes, some of which will focus on specific subjects at Level 3. The overall intention is further to ensure the quality of provision throughout the college and to provide a catalyst for change in the provision offered, if that appears necessary to enhance student achievement.

Making greater use of ICT

While the institutions that participated in LSDA's research see the need for greater use of ICT in their teaching and learning programmes, the spiralling costs involved with keeping hardware up to date are a great concern to senior management.

Staff at Rivington and Blackrod High School would like to see more flexible teaching strategies as participation widens. They see individualised student programmes and more ICT-based learning on the horizon. This view is shared by staff at GLOSCAT, who are developing strategies for delivering courses to small A2 and second-year vocational A-level groups, and looking to use combined Year 12 and Year 13 teaching groups.

For many institutions staff development is a priority, in order to enable more staff to make the best use of ICT within their own subjects. In some subjects, where such developments are well under way, course managers are starting to look at whether the formal contact time required in certain areas of courses could be reduced if students had increased access to resources.

Working in partnership

Part of the LSDA research focused on how schools and colleges have used partnerships to enhance the quality of their students' experiences of Curriculum 2000. The government has indicated that it wishes to see greater collaborative working between institutions providing post-16 education and more involvement of business and community organisations in post-16 programmes. In some parts of the country, such ways of working are an established feature. The Learning and Skills Council has also made clear its intention to encourage partnership arrangements in order to enhance the quality of provision available to pre- and post-19 learners at local level.

Case studies

Carmel College

Carmel College feels that it has successfully managed the introduction of Curriculum 2000, although a great deal of effort, forward-planning and flexibility among staff and students was required. Many aspects of teaching that usually required only maintaining or updating had to be overhauled, such as schemes of work, subject handbooks, examination and revision timetabling, and the college day.

Review of the key issues for 2000/01

Increasing student achievement

The college offers mostly advanced-level courses, and traditionally a typical student took three A-levels plus general studies. Our very successful GNVQ students also did an equivalent, 18-unit qualification. We did not expect the entire September 2000 intake to simply choose an additional AS-level. We sought to tailor our expectations to the cohort rather than adopting the one-size-fits-all approach. Thus, we expected 60% of our students to complete a programme equivalent to four AS levels, related to the number of GCSE points achieved and taken from the seven best scores. This seems to have been largely successful, and while we had to respond to requests from individual students to lighten their commitment, over 90% of the students who started the four AS-level programmes or equivalent completed it.

Achievement rates are very much in line with our expectations and the proportion of students taking four A2s has remained at around 10% – similar to the proportion taking four A-levels in previous years. However, we are mindful of the colleges that encouraged all students to take four AS levels and we will have to see how the different strategies affect average point scores as well as individual achievement.

Broadening student achievement

One aspect of the Curriculum 2000 agenda was to raise the esteem in which vocational education was held. Over a number of years we established four Advanced GNVQ courses and two intermediate courses, which were very successful. The advanced courses have since been replaced with the vocational A-level and we now offer this qualification in six subjects. We also offer the new Intermediate GNVQ in information and communications technology (ICT) and health and social care. It is worth noting that 21% of our total intake of students in September 2000 took an advanced vocational course – approximately double the figure of previous years – and 66% of individuals who took a vocational A-level also took an AS level. In the past, very few advanced-level vocational students had chosen to study an AS level too.

Educating the whole person

As a Catholic college with an ecumenical outlook our vision for education goes beyond the academic. We anticipated that the increased activity of students on programme would make our enrichment entitlement difficult to maintain with existing resources. The college has a general tutorial system in which about 20 students meet a group tutor for 3 hours and 20 minutes a week, fundamentally for individual student support. Increasingly this time was being used to deliver some aspects of general studies and religious education and to undertake a range of administrative and communication functions. We started to deliver Key Skills within this group tutor system, but it proved to be less effective than delivering Key Skills through subjects. It was also very unpopular with students and staff.

Timetabling and accommodation

We realised that increased student activity would require more physical resources and staff. Eight new classrooms and two IT suites were built in 2001, ready for September when both the lower sixth and upper sixth would be 'Curriculum 2000 students'. We also extended the working day by 10 minutes, although not the teaching time of staff, in order to protect the enrichment programme. We now have six equal-sized blocks of time in the week, which allows the college greater flexibility in moving lessons around. For instance, we can now swap a group tutor period on one day with a lesson on a different day to facilitate religious celebration. Wednesday afternoons have been freed up for enrichment activities such as Young Enterprise, community service, dance, drama and sporting activities.

Key issues for 2001/02

Key Skills and their role in entitlement

The role of Key Skills within the student entitlement has still to be fully resolved. Partly, this depends on the emphasis external agencies, including universities, place on them. We have decided that Key Skills are best developed when they are delivered naturally within subjects. Each subject area has chosen a Key Skill in which the appropriate teaching occurs and an opportunity to gather evidence for the portfolio is given. Difficulties arise when a student on an advanced-level programme needs to produce portfolio evidence for a Key Skill not covered by any of his or her taught subjects, or when a student requires specific teaching for a Key Skill at a level different to that being delivered in lessons. In these cases the group tutor becomes responsible for agreeing the student's requirements and monitoring the programme of Key Skills support lessons that have been arranged.

Sustaining commitment to the enrichment programme

The enrichment programme has had a tremendous start. The challenge now is to embed in it an ethos that reflects our distinctiveness: hard work, self-fulfilment and striving for high achievement with and for others. Wednesday afternoon has been set aside for sport and enrichment activities. We did fear that the extra commitment that students had to give to their core subjects would undermine commitment to extra-curricular activities. However, this has not been the case. Take-up of activities has been excellent, with almost all lower-sixth students involved. The students have undertaken extra-curricular activities with enthusiasm; now we must seek to ensure that this commitment is sustained.

Greater student achievement

Greater student achievement overall was almost assured. Over 50% of our students will achieve the equivalent of three taught A-levels, an AS level and general studies, as well as Key Skills and enrichment. AS-level results seem to reflect fairly well the established patterns for A-level results. However, the differential in achievement within the college may well be exacerbated rather than lessened by Curriculum 2000.

It is clear that students do best in the subjects that they have been taught before. When students embark on an AS level in history, maths, English or the sciences they know, largely from experience, that they will like it, otherwise they wouldn't have chosen it. This is often not the case for students who choose a subject like business studies, sociology or psychology, where at most one-third of the students will have studied it previously. These AS-level subjects would benefit if students could choose which subjects to take at A2; they could pick the 'new' subject on the basis of experience. Students who liked the subject (and who were probably achieving highly in it) would stay, and those who did not would choose another of their subjects to take at A2.

Although the college could not give students a guarantee in September 2000 that they would be able to take any three of their four AS-level subjects at A2, this is largely how it has worked out. Most subjects at the college are strong enough so that the students who decide to leave after the AS level are balanced out by the students who decide to stay, even though they had not chosen that A2 originally.

A predicament arises for those students who fail more than one AS level. If a student needs to take another AS level he or she is likely to choose another 'new' subject. Thus, subjects not widely available at GCSE may well suffer from the 'greener-grass syndrome' at both AS and A2. A strategy needs to be developed for such situations, but the obvious one of excluding students who fail an AS level is unlikely to find favour in educational communities.

Changes to vocational courses

Our greatest concern arising from Curriculum 2000 is the changes made to vocational courses. A main objective was to create parity of esteem between academic and vocational courses. Unfortunately, it seems this is being achieved largely by making the courses the same.

The assessment of vocational courses has become more like that used for A-levels.

The different vocational skills of planning, gathering and handling information that existed under GNVQ have been replaced by academic skills.

The knowledge tests of GNVQ have been replaced with examination of the higher level academic skills in longer exams of 2 to 2.5 hours, whereas the A-level papers have been shortened.

The specifications have become more detailed so teachers feel the need to spend more time in didactic teaching.

In addition, the drive to encourage students to mix the type of courses they take means that there are more subjects competing for students' time. As a result, agreement on time out of college for visits to businesses, work experience and residentials is often constrained by the teachers on the AS/A2 courses who demand, quite naturally, high attendance at their class.

Paradoxically, students on vocational courses are now disadvantaged in the first year of advanced work since there is no 'easier' transition qualification like the AS level before the harder work at A2. The AS level has been constructed to smooth progression to A2, facilitating progress from GCSE. The move from intermediate courses to vocational A-level, however, is now a step, and perhaps a much steeper step than existed before. It seems that vocational courses have been made harder by being made more like A-levels and in so doing they may no longer cater for the students who were well served by the GNVQ.

Changes made at Carmel College in September 2001

We planned to deliver the three main Key Skills at Level 2 to all lower sixth students on advanced and intermediate programmes. The students would then take Level 3 in the upper sixth, once they had achieved Level 2. The Key Skills programme was to be delivered largely through the group tutorial activities.

Since September 2001 students have taken diagnostic tests at induction to help us determine who should take Level 3 Key Skills and who would be more suited to Level 2. Key Skills are no longer delivered through group tutorials. Instead, they are largely delivered through subjects. Each subject has chosen a particular Key Skill to focus on and provides an opportunity to gather evidence for students' portfolios. Support lessons are provided for those students whose subjects do not cover the teaching for the Key Skills they are trying to achieve. The group tutor works with these students to ensure that they are aware and make the most of the entitlement.

For the second year of Curriculum 2000 we introduced a new timetable to allow us to develop a substantial enrichment programme.

Proposed future developments

We recognised that the transition from AS to A2 would be a critical stage for students and that some would need a good deal of advice and support from a range of agencies independent from the college. We now see that this support and advice system can be integrated within the college systems to give a seamless process for progression. In particular, students who are underachieving might well benefit from the introduction of these agencies at an earlier stage than the end of the lower sixth.

Achievement on vocational courses is giving us the greatest cause for concern. We were able to tailor the GNVQ to provide a programme that suited the needs of a large segment of students who were not catered for by A-levels. We are finding this much more difficult to do with the vocational A-level. However, we will strive to construct a vocational programme for students, elements of which we will tailor to suit the needs of individual students. For instance, some students would only be expected to take a double award plus further study support and/or a long-term work placement or other vocational short courses. Perhaps if they did well in the first year they could then take on an AS level in their second year and/or general studies. In this way we would seek to build a less steep incline over the transition from GCSE to advanced level to encourage progression and widen achievement.

The Castle School

Overview

- syllabus implemented in business, art and design, health and social care, ICT, and travel and tourism at vocational A-level, GNVQ Foundation, Intermediate and Part One. Key Skills offered as an optional extra and encouraged through subject, student and tutor awareness
- syllabus queries inevitable and interpretation difficult. Had hoped Edexcel meetings would help but they only raised further issues. Moderation kept very tightly to the assessment grids
- lack of an AS equivalent in some subjects bewildering to senior management team, who presumed parity with the AS level in all subjects
- difficulties with tests in January 2001, especially health and social care, and business options. Results lower than expected in several areas
- many students unable to complete at the higher level now
- larger drop-out rate than usual – especially going from intermediate to advanced. Need to have minimum 40 points/8 GCSEs at grade C including English, maths and science
- Key Skill tests at wrong levels and proxies very confusing for students. Need comparability with A-levels and no external test.

Review of the key issues for 2000/01

Use of exam data for initial choices

Exam data: will keep 40 points as a minimum guide for vocational A-levels.

Key Skills introduction and assessment

- too much for students
- encouraged awareness, but certification optional (very few opting)
- teaching needs to be developed in general studies but staff not willing
- testing at wrong level.

Examination period and mocks

- summer start for A2s before vocational A-levels completed, due to length of exam period. Otherwise OK
- mocks in April very useful for June exams
- retain mock exams and study leave to keep parity with GCE set-up.

Extra-curricular activities and work experience

- difficult to incorporate
- Young Enterprise not run
- work experience in holidays.

Key issues for 2001/02

Standards: interpretation of syllabus/standards in light of standards moderator

Levels: where is the bottom Intermediate GNVQ/bottom vocational A-level? Are these the right courses or would BTEC National/GCE/NVQ be easier, more appropriate and more interesting for disaffected students?

Tests: being assessed at the right level? – especially health and social care, and business options

Target setting: difficult when we do not know the level required. Many students (especially borderline students) moving down a level from pre-2000 courses.

Other issues:

- staffing
- timetabling
- accommodation
- internet access
- access to confidential areas in health and social care proving difficult for data collection
- textbooks not keeping pace with subjects, eg business options.

Changes made at The Castle School in September 2001

- very strict adherence to 40 points at GCSE for vocational A-level
- greater use of foundation level for borderline intermediate students
- used assignment grid and syllabus very specifically
- held INSET on external testing requirements/techniques
- check moderator reports carefully
- ensure all subjects work to deadlines, especially art and design
- left Key Skills as optional, but encouraged staff to develop them in their teaching.

Proposed future developments

- remove students who do not keep up as no monies for non-completion and students count against us if unclassified at end
- need to check post-16 funding
- separate subjects and co-teach different levels if group size too small to set
- need courses for disaffected students
- need to check suitability of the more academic vocational A-level/GNVQ for all students. Is GCE/GCSE easier?
- watch changes in Key Skills to see if they are any easier to implement and have a currency in higher education and employment
- review GNVQ changes for a suitable post-16 course for the less academic student which offers progression to vocational A-level or GCE A-level after 1 year
- size of groups may become an issue depending on funding.

Cricklade College

Overview

'A mixed bag' best describes 2000/01. There were some excellent results for students – and some real disappointments. Key Skills were and still are a problem. The effectiveness of the awarding bodies and the accuracy of assessment were real concerns, too. Most of our preparation was appropriate, with the exception of Key Skills.

Our experience of Curriculum 2000 was affected by substantial internal change, which continues today. From September 2000 the college was engaged in a management restructure, followed by a support staff restructure. The college is now undergoing a review of the roles and responsibilities of teaching staff. We have completely revised our quality assurance arrangements and are continuing a thorough curriculum review, which commenced last year.

There have been substantial improvements to accommodation and resource levels. Our staff turnover increased and although we managed to fill all vacancies, the number of applicants in some areas was low.

Review of key issues for 2000/01

Key Skills

The achievement rates nationally and within the college were not good. At Cricklade, the integration of Key Skills into main programmes was patchy, with some subjects being more successful than others. The main hurdle was convincing students of the value of the qualifications. Understandably, most students wanted to concentrate on their main programme, so when the workload became too heavy it was Key Skills that suffered.

In spite of staff development events, not all staff were sufficiently confident or skilled to assess and support students effectively. We believe that this was due to inadequate time leading up to the implementation of the initiative. Our college inspector praised the approach we had taken but criticised the burden of the timetable for students and the initial diagnostic process, which did not adequately identify students' level of Key Skills competence. We have since changed the diagnostic tool but have had some problems implementing it.

We restructured to create a unit dedicated to learner development, which brings together Key Skills, tutorial, enrichment and learning support. This has been part of a wider reorganisation so the unit has still to settle fully into a satisfactory set of routines.

The changes to the funding methodology have enabled us to remove the compulsion for students to take the qualifications. Students are now only registered with the awarding body once they are ready. Incidentally, we changed our awarding body to reduce cost and bureaucracy. We have also put more emphasis on the wider Key Skills in the tutorial programme.

Staff development in Key Skills

We were unsuccessful in increasing the number of staff with Key Skills qualifications, so this remains an objective in our continuing professional development plan. There were two obstacles:

- **Time** – the college was in the process of restructuring throughout 2000/01 and this process continues. From October 2000 onwards, managers were changing roles and staff turnover increased. The initiative lost some of its impetus.
- **Priorities** – implementing the Curriculum 2000 specifications successfully was the priority for most staff.

Transition from AS to A2

This has been less problematic than previously thought, given the contingency planned into the timetable in 2000/01. We are analysing the nature and scope of the changes made by students and will be comparing these with the group of colleges with whom we benchmark. We have some small A2 groups.

The plan to commence A2 in the summer term was successful in some subjects, but not universally. The situation was complicated by the vocational and academic mix of some students' programmes and the difference in their assessment commitments. The examination period was protracted for many students who therefore could only attend part of the A2 classes. The assessment burden was intense. The majority of students were tired and needed a break.

We implemented the planned advice and guidance programmes so that students were able to make their second-year choices before the end of the academic year. There were some changes when results were announced in August, but the routine September enrolment processes coped with these.

Entry requirements for advanced level

The entry requirements remain the same. Although we have not carried out any detailed research, the reasons for withdrawal from programmes do not suggest that there was a mismatch between ability and level of course.

Key issues for 2001/02

Key Skills
Key Skills remains an issue (see page 21).

Staff development in Key Skills
Staff training in Key Skills remains an issue (see page 22).

Awarding bodies
The preparedness of the awarding bodies and the accuracy of results are concerns. Our experiences of a lack of clear and consistent advice and support for the new qualifications have been similar to those reported nationally. We have had to request several re-marks at A- and AS levels, most of which have been successful. We also had cause to complain to Edexcel about the operation of moderation procedures.

Internal moderation
This year's work focuses on ensuring adequate internal moderation across programmes that have previously not had much experience of the process. We have introduced a fuller quality assurance framework for the verification/moderation of all courses, which is monitored and supported by a cross-college central verification team.

Changes made at Cricklade College in September 2001

The main changes have been in the area of Key Skills. In addition, we have removed minority AS-level choices (critical thinking and science for public understanding) and have continued other courses into A2 that we thought would not be popular (eg film studies).

Proposed future developments

The college is reviewing the whole of its offer, particularly Level 1 and Level 2 provision. The introduction of GCSEs in vocational subjects forms part of this.

New learning director posts are being created to provide 'champions' in areas such as:

- the 14–19 curriculum
- enrichment
- Key Skills (IT, Application of Number and Communication)
- wider Key Skills.

There will also be other advanced practitioner roles to coordinate the work of clusters of programmes. Some of these will concentrate on specific subjects at Level 3. All of these posts are designed to improve quality and responsiveness in the curriculum and may result in a refinement of the Level 3 offer.

Other changes will affect delivery. We are considering the amount of time allocated to the delivery of courses and the proportion of time spent in directed study, learning workshops, and using online learning. We are also reviewing the shape of the timetable and the college year to enable greater flexibility in the delivery of programmes to part-time learners and in vocational areas.

Exeter College

Overview

2000/01 was quite a turbulent year for Exeter College, not helped by the fact that we decided to re-badge at the same time that Curriculum 2000 was introduced. However, what has emerged is a structure better able to support 16–19 year olds and adult learners.

Staff showed understandable anxiety in trying to keep in touch with developments. Keeping up the pace and meeting deadlines proved difficult for staff and students, and the fracturing effects of increased modularisation were evident. That said, we do not believe that the impact was as powerful as the media and certain high-profile schools suggested. Our students did not seem over-worked in the main, although our staff were, in their striving to establish standards. Results were sound with a couple of stars and some difficulties and disappointments in humanities. The logistics of the examinations were desperately demanding, exacerbated by the number of candidates with special considerations. Careful guidance, close tutoring and tracking of attendance and attainment emerge as the key factors to success.

Review of key issues for 2000/01

Ongoing guidance for students moving into their second year

We were anxious to establish ongoing guidance for students moving into their second year and for them to do an A2 pre-vacation module. Partial success was achieved but there was sufficient shortfall for us to commission an 'independent' review (funded through our additional funding allocation) by a member of the guidance team.

Two problems were evident.

The timing of guidance by tutors and the resultant course change documentation slipped by at least a month. The consequence was that with limited data, the degree of group changes emerged late. We had to combine more groups than anticipated, including a large number of tutor groups. We were convinced that in order to have stability in September 2001 and for students to get used to new groups, it was better to make changes for the 1-month, pre-vacation module. Staff had not realised fully what that would mean and managers had not warned them of change thoroughly enough, partly because we had little sense of the scale of change. The worst that happened was that some staff and some students were upset. To relieve the concerns of members of staff we paid them even though they weren't teaching; we shall not do that again. We concentrated on students changing programmes but we are not convinced that all students got sufficient support.

The pre-vacation modules were prepared by staff for common teaching. They varied in quality but the best were very good. Student attendance varied from nearly 100% to 20%. Some students and parents had booked holidays for the last few weeks of term; some students felt affronted at being asked to work after their AS-level examinations; and a few had exams which cut across the pre-vacation module. However, some students did really successful preparatory work. We still think the scheme was sound and will refine it for future years.

Key Skills

Key Skills proved to be as difficult as we had envisaged. External researchers commended our planning and organisation but this wasn't enough to warrant commitment from all staff and students. The bureaucracy of assessment and the inability of external verifiers to understand what a college such as ours could achieve caused problems. Press coverage of Key Skills didn't help either. Level 3 students were simply not fully convinced of the value of the qualifications, but we think we are beginning to win many over. Structures and delivery frames are good even though compliance still leaves quite a bit to be desired.

The volatility of student decision-making

The volatility of student decision-making was as severe as we had predicted. We did see students reducing on-course programmes, despite making it a little harder for them by allowing only one member of staff to authorise this after the first half term. We ran 'late-starting general studies' groups to scoop up defectors, unless we believed they would be unable to cope. Students did complain about heavy timetables, but what Curriculum 2000 did was to stretch the continuum of student achievement. The best students were extraordinarily good (five AS levels at grade A).

A new timetable

We discussed devising a new timetable but we decided to tidy up the existing one. It is a five-option model with two extra sessions attached loosely to tutoring. So, in a way it's a 5.5 model.

Key issues for 2001/02

Some student achievement at AS level (summer 2002) and at A2; at vocational A-level and in diplomas

Achievement at A2 in summer 2001 improved but it was more variable at AS level. Notably, the A-level Information Service (ALIS) indicated that nearly all of our humanities courses were underachieving. Diplomas and vocational A-levels varied too.

We have had to reduce teaching time for vocational A-levels. Staff think that they may have grasped what is required, but we are not sure that summer 2002 will show consistent and high achievement. What we see are assessment regimes that are better focused, meaning that staff will have to teach closely to criteria and prepare and assess coursework and assignments in a much more targeted way. Time is shorter with Curriculum 2000; there is more fragmentation and a loss of teaching weeks. Students (and their parents) still want to change courses after half term when, realistically, 25% of the AS level has been completed. We continue to use the January session but issues of certification and retakes become more arcane and a gamble. We are using additional funding for retake support, for targeted revision for AS and A2 modules, and to revise and improve our AS–A2 pre-vacation modules. The new examination schedule means an even tighter teaching plan.

Securing appropriate progression from year one to year two

We are not sure that we yet advise students consistently and intensively enough to secure their best outcomes. Sometimes change seems almost whimsical and lecturers of 'hard' subjects worry about their reduced second-year groups. We will have to work harder on compliance with our tutors' year plan to secure thought-through choices and timely data to set-up year two groups.

Improved commitment to Key Skills and enrichment

We have tried to integrate tutoring, enrichment and Key Skills into a new 'points tariff' scheme to define breadth and its value.

Developing 'responsible learning' values in students

Funding and budget decisions mean that in 2001/02 group sizes have increased (average group size is up from 16 to 17 and some groups have over 20 students). The alternative was to reduce the time for AS/A2 from its 4 hours and 50 minutes. Small groups (under 15 students in A2) have reduced time to improve viability. The upshot of this is that the pedagogy has to adapt, and Curriculum 2000 gives an opportunity for this. With over half of all students taking four 'curriculum options' at Level 3 in the first year, the traditional teaching styles that compensated for relatively modest input from homework are under pressure. We are trying to instil a culture of 'responsible learning' in students, supported by more thorough tracking of on-course attainment. Unless we shift the balance to students learning responsibly (and we are trying to teach them explicitly what that means) then the specifications will not be covered well enough to secure success.

Changes made at Exeter College in September 2001

- using additional funding to focus on retakes, revision and targeting underachievement in relation to value-added indicators
- ensuring that tutors get into transition guidance sufficiently early so that trends can be seen and group changes signalled well in advance
- developing a more coherent way to deliver Key Skills and enrichment
- investigating issues in preparation for transition and relating this to initial guidance
- using a new initial assessment instrument
- marketing the International Baccalaureate more aggressively
- producing better procedures for student work submission.

Proposed future developments

- look at cutting contact time unless costs ease
- work on guidance 'bundling of subjects' for maximum achievement, if we get the data
- match prior achievement and other success factors to courses more closely
- work on the 14–19 curriculum with the city's high schools
- use specific learning resource workshops to promote 'responsible learning'
- promote diplomas (and probably reduce the number of vocational A-levels)
- encourage more cross-qualification types of programme (unless DfES sticks to the current league tables), and more across levels.

GLOSCAT

Overview

The general impression is that 2000/01 was a year spent trying to catch up and then keep ahead of events. This started with the complete redesign of our curriculum offer to meet the needs of Curriculum 2000, and the development of the sixth form centre.

Highlights of 2000/01

- Subject specifications were late arriving and this led to delays in curriculum development. Staff found it difficult to catch up.
- Staff were unsure about the content, level and assessment of AS levels. This improved as the year went on and they became more confident. A lot of subject staff liked the new format once they were used to it.
- There were major problems with Key Skills in terms of delivery, staffing and students' motivation. We only really got to grips with this halfway through the year, by which time we had lost a number of students – especially at Level 3.
- The vocational A-level programme seemed particularly difficult with a high student drop-out rate expected in year one. There seemed very little time to build up student skills.
- The more flexible curriculum led to higher drop-out rates for some subjects and some small group sizes for year two classes. The nature of the matrix and the split-site operation made it difficult to combine groups in year two. There was a definite increase in students finishing after 1 year and not wishing to continue with their studies. We have reduced the amount of flexibility for 2001/02.
- Overall, 2000/01 was a difficult and stressful year for staff and students. A lot of lessons were learnt.

Review of key issues for 2000/01

Shortage of skilled staff

This proved to be a problem throughout the year, particularly for science, computing and Key Skills (multi-skilled staff) and care. Towards the end of the year we had new recruits in all of these areas. However, differences between conditions of service and salaries in schools and colleges began to have a limited impact with some full-time and part-time staff leaving to work in schools. The staff shortages were reflected in some of the results achieved by students over the year.

Key Skills

There was a major rethink of Key Skills and how they were organised. We moved back to subject-based Key Skills groups for vocational A-levels and increased delivery from mainstream lecturers. A Key Skills manager was also appointed to oversee the whole operation on both sites. There were ongoing problems with attendance and student motivation. The organisation and logistics of the Key Skills tests proved to be problematic and very time consuming.

Induction and guidance

A more rigid interview and selection process to get students on the right course from the start led to a reduction of option choice and a tighter timescale for making changes. The whole interview process became better as staff became more familiar with the whole programme and what it required of students.

The induction time proved to be too long (1 week) in the first instance, with students wanting to start their 'proper' subjects much earlier. This led to a redesign of the induction programme with initial college induction over 3 days and then the rest of the programme taken up with tutorials. This was well received by the following year's students.

We allowed more time for administration between enrolment and induction, which enabled us to get a clear picture of each student's proposed programme. As a result, we were more organised at the start of the main induction programme, which was conducted a lot more smoothly.

Examinations

All of the issues to do with examinations came to pass as expected. There were a number of unavoidable clashes for students, which increased stress levels.

Key issues for 2001/02

Key Skills

Key Skills are still causing some problems this year, although the reduced assessment burden has helped. A 'hangover' remains after last year's problems and year two students are very unenthusiastic about them. Large numbers of students still question their usefulness especially when they get lukewarm responses from universities to them. We have had more success with Level 2 programmes where Key Skills are much more accepted and integrated into the courses. We are offering the wider Key Skills as part of an extended tutorial programme as staff and students see them as highly relevant. It has proved difficult to find staff able to teach all the Key Skills and this is an ongoing problem that we are tackling through staff development.

Examinations

Our concerns in this area are to do with the volume of examinations and the longer period of time over which they are offered. We seem to experience between 6 and 8 weeks of exam disruption in the summer, which causes problems for students, staff teaching and examination staff. There is also a loss of confidence in the vocational A-level qualifications, given the negative publicity they received last year surrounding results and examination boards' administration problems.

Level 2 and Level 3 courses

The changes to the vocational A-level and the AS level seem to have opened up the gap between Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. Most institutions have increased the entry requirements for Level 3 programmes meaning that a number of students who do not meet the requirements have nowhere to go. We are looking at developing almost a Level 2.5 to help bridge the gap. This 1-year course will include a limited range of AS-level qualifications, GCSEs, intermediate vocational qualifications and work experience. The GCSEs in vocational subjects will be added to the mix when they become available.

Progression

The programming for year one to year two is not as clear-cut as in the past. A number of students have taken a decision not to progress beyond AS level, or they take further AS levels instead of A2s. This flexibility is good but it has led to some small A2 and vocational A-level groups in the second year. We are reviewing which subjects we offer up to the full A-level in future years.

Changes made at GLOSCAT in September 2001

- incremented entry requirements for AS/A-level and vocational A-level programmes
- cleaner and more focused interview process that retains the flexibility for students to change but within a more limited period of time
- better initial assessment to identify problems and to target help
- shorter initial induction programme but extended events throughout tutorial sessions
- flexible Level 2 programmes (called Focus) to cater for a broad range of students at this level
- more structured tutorial programme with clear target setting and monitoring. Tutors more subject specific
- better student tracking using electronic register (not working well) and attendance officers (working well)
- much smoother introduction of Key Skills as an integral part of all programmes
- started well but still problems with staffing
- introduction of the wider Key Skills, delivered through the tutorial programme.

Proposed future developments

- improved diagnostic tests given earlier in the programme and followed up
- full review of Level 1 and 2 programmes in the light of the introduction of vocational A-levels and the gap between Levels 2 and 3
- review of the service we receive from examination boards
- introduction of specific support programmes for some subjects, such as chemistry for biologists
- develop programme to allow progression for students with non-standard entry qualification (diploma in advanced studies as a Level 2.5 programme)
- develop delivery strategies for small A2 and second-year vocational A-level groups via information and learning technology and combined teaching groups
- implement partnership programmes with schools to develop Level 2 provision for 14–18 year olds.

Huddersfield New College

Overview

The college broadly welcomed the Curriculum 2000 initiative. The students found it hard going and voiced their views on Key Skills in a very forceful manner. The extra funding was, of course, welcomed but only really paid for the extra provision. The AS-level examinations gave us cause for concern and many subject leaders are still frustrated with the AS syllabuses. Many view the vocational A-levels as a retrograde step and feel that vocational courses at advanced level have been diluted to a level where they are too similar to AS and A2 equivalents. The non-comparability of levels in the AS year has caused problems for students.

Review of key issues for 2000/01

Key Skills

There are still many issues to do with Key Skills. Providing the appropriate level of support is very important and we will not be in a position to evaluate this fully until we see the test results.

Tutoring

We are very much on top of this issue now, but the full effectiveness of the tutor in the role of Key Skills coordinator will not be clear until later in the year.

Citizenship

The debate surrounding AS level General Studies and AS level Citizenship rumbles on.

Resitting GCSE English or Maths alongside an advanced programme of study

This has become less of an issue.

Key issues for 2001/02

Raising achievement in the A2 cohort

This is a major issue for the college, particularly as our AS-level results were not that strong. The logical argument is that results should now improve at A2, but there is still a strong sense of 'working in the dark' regarding the levels of examining we can expect at A2.

Raising achievement at AS level

A great deal of analysis went on in August 2001 regarding the achievement of students. Results were very disappointing in a handful of subjects. Were the lessons learned? Time will tell, but there is a strong suspicion that guidelines to examiners might change in some areas. Is it acceptable that the national pass rates should vary so widely? The difficulties in maths, for example, led to very poor retention in this area. This really must be brought into line with other subjects for the system to work.

Awarding bodies reporting results in vocational subjects to the centre

This was disgraceful in 2001 and the college felt compelled to express its views to QCA. In some cases results were late, in others incomplete, and in almost all cases pretty well incomprehensible.

Key Skills assessment

The changes implemented mid-cycle were welcomed as the college is now able to apply a more sensible approach to the issue. The way the college implemented its policy in 2000/01 meant that the changes fitted in well, but there were doubtless many colleges that were very annoyed at the change in policy. Exemptions and administering Key Skills are still nightmares. The tests really ought to go and assessment should be made through the main subject areas instead.

Changes made at Huddersfield New College in September 2001

- A more effective 'flowchart approach' has been implemented to ensure that students are put on the right level Key Skills programme.
- The specialist tutor system has been fully implemented and seems to be working well.
- Changes are planned for the examination period in May and June. All study leave will be scrapped and lessons will continue right up to the exam. The view is that many students are lacking the skills and maturity to revise independently.
- January modules are being taken in the A2 year, including resits of AS modules.

Proposed future developments

It is too early to give details, but changes are likely to the general studies and citizenship curricula. New AS levels, such as philosophy and geology, will inevitably come in.

Rivington and Blackrod High School

Overview

We feel that Curriculum 2000 went reasonably well compared with the other great curriculum initiatives of recent years and despite the unhelpful, if sincere, interventions just as our students were approaching their summer examinations. There was some satisfaction to be gained from setting up a workable structure and managing change for the benefit of students. The decision of most students to select four AS levels plus Key Skills proved a wise one.

The school did experience some cautionary reflection. Our retention rate worsened slightly due to students feeling challenged earlier on in their programmes and not having sufficient time to mature before examinations. Our wish to teach an AS level in 4 hours per week, per subject caused concern for a number of staff, and some departments coped better than others. Possibly the subjects needing greater teacher presence and constant practice of skills fared worst, for example languages and mathematics. GNVQ giving way to a 'beefed-up' and parity-seeking vocational A-level could be disconcerting. Key Skills did prove a challenge despite our best planning. Overall, we felt it an achievement to have planned and delivered the first year of Curriculum 2000.

Review of key issues for 2000/01

Key Skills for all

This is still ambitious and especially daring in getting most students to aim for Level 3. We think it is simple and justifiable to involve all students, to provide a dedicated core programme of study with cross-curricular links and to keep training an interested and committed team.

Maintaining enrichment

This proved to be less of a problem for us. We maintained our form period programme and the personal and social service scheme. Possibly restricting each AS level to 4 hours per week helped. The Duke of Edinburgh award and Young Enterprise still happened. A shrewd move was to position work experience in the first week of Year 13. This prevented it cutting into valuable AS teaching time; took away what is always a truncated, administration-ridden week; and allowed some students to place it flexibly in any holiday week.

Academic and vocational co-habitation

This had proved a problem with GNVQ when the 'extra' A-level was often sidelined, but seemed less so under Curriculum 2000. Academic and vocational courses have co-habited well in the individual's timetable.

Progression from Year 12 to Year 13

We had thoughtfully provided timetable blocks that would theoretically allow every set to progress to Year 13 should it be required. The retention rate after year one was good enough and sets sufficiently viable to allow us to continue all the sets, except two. These being inevitably small, it was relatively easy to manage a way around the timetable for the students affected.

Key issues for 2001/02

Better tracking of Key Skills achievements and exemptions

We need to track each student effectively – especially as there are more proxy exemptions from external tests – and to ensure that students deliver their portfolio work.

Extending the curriculum to provide more breadth and further participation

How can a relatively small sixth form with approximately 250 students really provide a choice for students of all abilities? The answer lies in collaboration. The West Bolton Federal College came into existence in November 2001. It encompasses our school, the Horwich campus of Bolton College, Westhoughton High School, and the Alliance Training group. There must be a course somewhere!

Managing the examination process

Contemplating January 2002 was fascinating. How do you manage Year 12 mocks, Year 12 AS-level examinations, Year 13 mocks, Year 13 AS retakes and Year 13 A2 examinations without disrupting teaching and learning for 6 weeks? Could the answer be to put mocks in prior to lesson time, cancel any leave of absence and cut January's external modules as much as possible?

Maintaining quality of provision

We wonder how well we all adapted to the new AS and A2 content and assessments. Do we read the fine print of new syllabuses sufficiently? Do we adapt old strategies to hard-pressed time slots? Action research is essential.

Changes made at Rivington and Blackrod High School in September 2001

- In an attempt to bring more breadth to the curriculum and encourage participation, we are extending our vocational range with a National Diploma in sport science and vocational A-levels in engineering and ICT.
- We are making a special effort with Key Skills. Rather than minimise their importance because the nation's subject-orientated teachers did not take to them easily last year, we are tending to stress their link to eventual employability and to preserve their central place in the curriculum. We are auditing and training for the wider Key Skills too. To aid delivery, staff training has increased, more time for monitoring has been provided and we are participating in a project funded by LSDA.
- We have more of an idea of the pace necessary to deliver AS levels. We are hoping to push on the inculcation of basic content in most subjects, extend independent 'spade work' by the students and leave more time for coursework and revision.
- Conscious of the weight and intricacy of the exam periods, we are planning our calendar well in advance and running feasibility studies on how best to work examination periods with the minimum of disruption.

Proposed future developments

- We would like to see more flexible teaching strategies as participation widens. Individual student programmes and more IT-based learning are on the horizon.
- A new electronic library is due in April 2002. School resource centres need to become more like the best university libraries. Books are still vital to stimulate reading for meaning and reflection, to build vocabulary and qualify ideas, rather than skimming for mere information retrieval.
- Collaboration will have to spread or Curriculum 2000 cannot be available to all. Our answer lies with West Bolton Federal College.
- Quality assurance is a must. Learning needs to be evaluated regularly due to the range of courses, the constant innovation and the need for good retention and achievement for secure funding. We are committed to consulting our consumers. Questionnaires, focus groups, student councils, data analysis and review will become familiar features at the school.

Tameside College

Overview

- Achievement at AS level was above the national average pass rate with good results in Level 1 and 2 vocational courses.
- Key Skills were an issue:
  - QCA exemplar tests were not an accurate assessment of level
  - there was a lack of recommended diagnostic testing by the examination board
  - information about standards arrived too late
  - there was a lack of Level 1 exemplar material
  - students regarded the qualifications as an additional burden, which resulted in poor attendance at external tests
  - students found Level 3 tests difficult. For example, Application of Number at Level 3 was a challenge for students who had passed GCSE Maths at grade C or above.
- There is a lack of consistency in the difficulty of AS and A2, and no AS equivalent for the vocational A-level. In some vocational subjects, for example art and design, modular tests seemed to assess the level of written English rather than knowledge of the subject.
- The number of external assessments disrupted the teaching programme and shortened the teaching time available.
- Initial induction and guidance took much longer than anticipated due to the complexity and choices available. There is a need for similar guidance towards the end of year one.
- A broad enrichment programme was offered, even though there was no funding incentive to offer additional qualifications.
- Problems occurred with the reporting of achievement from examination boards. Edexcel failed to pull achievements from January tests through when reporting final results.
- There is a lack of clarity in guidance relating to cashing in AS levels at the end of Year 12.

Review of key issues for 2000/01

Provision of a broader range of diagnostic tests

The college has ensured that Key Skills tests for Levels 1 and 2 are available to both staff and students electronically on WebCT. QCA provided exemplar tests and access to copies of January 2000 tests. No exemplar tests were available from the examination boards.

Investigation and implementation of an online student tracking system

Key Skills tests for Levels 1 and 2 are available online and student progress can be tracked and collated. Student tracking at college level was not felt to be a priority.

Increase in the number of staff with Key Skills practitioner qualifications

The number of staff who achieved the full Key Skill's practitioner qualification increased to one qualified Key Skills assessor and three fully qualified Key Skills practitioners.

In-house Key Skills training

Staff across the college who held Key Skills coordinator or delivery roles were targeted for external courses and in-house training sessions. Best practice was also shared in regular cross-college meetings of Key Skills coordinators.

Key issues for 2001/02

Key Skills

There is a lack of clarification from the Association of Colleges and Estelle Morris – and mixed messages. We are also concerned that a lack of support opportunities for students to achieve Key Skills in colleges such as Tameside may have a negative effect on retention and achievement.

Widely differing levels of difficulty between subjects at AS and A2

Achievements in some AS subjects are not seen as an appropriate guide or preparation for A2. Vocational A-levels have no AS equivalent, so the single unit combined with an AS level in Year 12 is not always appropriate.

Group sizes

The broader first year curriculum has narrowed down in the second year resulting in some small A2 groups, and therefore timetable and staffing issues.

Examination process and disruption to teaching time

The number of external assessments and the resulting disruption to teaching has an impact on the college calendar.

Changes made at Tameside College in September 2001

- All Key Skills are now assessed by AQA. Edexcel was the main examining board in 2000/01.
- The college has made a decision to support students without GCSE Maths, English and ICT at grade C or above to work towards the achievement of Key Skills at Level 2. All full-time, 16–18-year-old students on Level 3 programmes will be encouraged to achieve at least one Key Skill at Level 3.
- The system of using general studies as a vehicle to evidence Key Skills was not successful. In 2001/02 only Communication at Level 3 will be tracked through general studies.
- We adopted Greenhead College's value-added system for AS and A2.

Proposed future developments

- increased use of information and learning technology in the curriculum
- further developments in partnerships with schools and other colleges.

Thomas Alleyne's High School

Overview

Our experience of Curriculum 2000 was largely positive, although there was some apprehension by staff new to a modular framework and some fatalism by students facing four AS levels.

Certain decisions taken before September 2000 helped with implementation.

- All A-level students would do four AS levels unless there was a special reason for not doing so. Out of 144 students, 141 completed four AS levels.
- All students would continue with their four AS levels until July 2001 so that the decision about which three subjects to take to A2 could be based solely on exam results. There was some opposition to this proposal but we ignored it, and every student studied four AS levels until July.
- In June and July 2001 sixth form tutors were heavily involved in taking soundings about possible choices for A2 subjects. These choices were finalised in August when students came into school to register for A2.

Simple analysis of the AS-level results showed that in 14 out of 20 subjects they were slightly or considerably better than our A-level results.

Review of key issues for 2000/01

Key Skills

A group of 15 AS-level students for whom Key Skills play a prominent part of their application are participating in an online pilot.

Managing January and June examinations

This is still an issue – not so much as a time factor, but to do with what serves the interests of students.

Student guidance

We hope we have addressed this.

Advice to students on HE applications

We are still not sure and suspect higher education isn't either.

Key issues for 2001/02

The resit debate

While everyone now accepts the resit as part of the AS/A2 culture, its impact on ongoing work and estimating eventual grades is still to be assessed. In September 2001 we were not confident that in every case we gave students the best advice about 'cashing in'.
We came down on the side of 'take the AS level, or maybe resit a module to improve the overall A grade and move on'.

Key Skills

We're still not sure of their value. On the national stage their status seems to be in decline, even if we can all agree that they are desirable. Furthermore, the logistical problem of putting them within the A-level framework, where all teaching resources are directed towards teaching A-level, is considerable.

Within the vocational A-level cohort, GCSE resits are increasingly seen as a preferable qualification. They are likely to carry more weight in UCAS applications when all advice from universities about Key Skills is qualified in order not to disadvantage any candidates who haven't achieved Key Skills. What conclusion are we to draw from that?

The demise of Intermediate GNVQ post-16

For the first time since their inception we are not offering any intermediate programmes in 2002. The health and social care course we offered this year collapsed in September. We are concerned about meeting the needs of the student for whom a vocational A-level is unsuitable.

The standard of vocational A-levels

The rigour of vocational A-level year one unit tests is in contrast to the perceived, more moderate difficulty of AS-level modular examinations.

Changes made at Thomas Alleyne's High School in September 2001

- Some staff new to the modular framework may well adjust the pace of their teaching, probably adopting a slightly more relaxed style.
- We still intend to allow departments to decide for themselves about entering students for the Year 12 January examinations, although we may be detecting a move towards waiting until June.
- Key Skills are under review. With the A-level contingent we are probably going to be selective in our entry.

Proposed future developments

- At Key stage 4 we are introducing a GCSE in health and social care in September 2002. The Part One GNVQ Manufacturing, which came on stream in September 2001, will be replaced by its GCSE equivalent.
- Active consideration is being given to offering Open University courses principally to Year 12 students. The governors' approval is required and the students will have to be identified in the autumn term of 2002 with a view to their studies beginning in 2003.
- The only post-16 vocational qualification we offer is the vocational A-level. We are aware of a gap in our curriculum owing to the imminent demise of Intermediate GNVQ, as well as a lack of take-up within the school by the current Year 12.
- The structure of our A-level and vocational A-level courses allows for little mixing and matching.

Thurston Community College

Overview

Some issues began to surface after the first half term (the honeymoon period) of Curriculum 2000. There was a great deal of work to do in a short space of time. Students also found it very difficult to take responsibility for their learning so soon after GCSE; there was no transition period that allowed them to become autonomous learners. These issues and comments made by staff and students suggest the need for a more detailed induction programme that should perhaps start in the July after the GCSE exams.

Attempts by teaching staff to remain upbeat and positive at all times were dealt a serious blow by the negative press coverage of AS-level exams only days before students had to sit module examinations.

A major problem has been the lack of continuity in subjects studied at Year 12 and taken into Year 13. At the beginning of Year 12 all students started a programme of four subjects, whether it was four AS levels, three AS levels and one vocational A-level or two AS levels and two vocational A-levels. After 4 or 5 weeks only 60% of students were still following a programme of four subjects. Students found it difficult to manage the demands of doing four subjects and so decided to focus on three. At the end of Year 12, when our students had started full A2 courses, only 5% of the year group were still following a four-subject programme.

This has caused us a huge timetable problem. Curriculum 2000 was 'fitted' into our traditional timetable blocking system. So, instead of timetabling and staffing three subjects per student, we increased it to four subjects – a massive increase in our staffing and resource costs. However, by the end of Year 12 most subjects had experienced a 25% drop-out rate, with some subjects having much higher drop out. Some of the Year 13 groups are now running with only five or six students, which is not economically viable. This has necessitated changes to our timetable blocking arrangements and the way we market subjects to our Year 11 students.

Review of key issues for 2000/01

Tutor periods

From January to July 2001, each Year 12 tutor group was allocated a 50-minute 'academic tutor period' per week. The aim was to use this period for group and individual work on issues such as Key Skills, time management and UCAS applications. However, with AS-level courses finishing in May, ready for June's examinations, this tutor period was never fully utilised. Also, the vast majority of students found it difficult to decide on a university or further programme of study as they wanted to see the results of their AS-level examinations in August.

As a result it was decided that this tutor period was not achieving the desired outcome. There was also a huge cost factor involved. The result is that it has now been scrapped. In its place is the new sixth form team plus a full-time administrator to help in the day-to-day running and to oversee the UCAS procedures. Also, there has been an enhanced focus on the 15-minute registration time in the morning.

Advice about new courses

In an attempt to prevent the loss of students to other sixth forms and students starting on the wrong package of subjects in Year 12, a great deal of work has been done since the start of September 2001. The main focus has been on giving information about the courses and extra activities we run. The main activities include:

- restructuring the lower-school pastoral system away from mixed, horizontal tutor groups to vertical year tutor groups. This has allowed for the first time Year 11 tutors to spend 15 minutes with their Year 11 tutees every morning
- in-house training and information-giving sessions for Year 11 tutors, led by the sixth form team
- Year 11 tutor group visits to the sixth form centre during a programme of morning registrations for informal question and answer sessions
- sixth form launch (held on 31 November 2001, 7pm–9 pm)
- application form deadline (16 November 2001)
- a pre-Christmas period of one-to-one interviews
- mock exams for Year 11 in January
- a final round of one-to-one interviews and final choices for sixth form in March 2002.

All of these activities give our Year 11 students an opportunity to discuss their aspirations, and enable us to ensure that all relevant information is conveyed.

Report writing

With the continued union advice, report writing and monitoring is a sensitive issue. The main concern is the current Year 12 reporting system and the style of UCAS statements that it produces. The current system is to use Year 12 reports. The problem is that these are constructed in May/June of the academic year. Many students are not making firm decisions about university and which courses to choose until they have received their AS-level results. Therefore, as a sixth form team we have had to approach Year 13 teachers and request a new UCAS statement in the September. This has received mixed responses. The suggestion is that for the Year 12 students in 2001/02 we have continuous monitoring.

Target grades

To help staff to continue with ongoing monitoring we have again invested in the ALIS data service. The projected grades for our current Year 12 students were available in December 2001. These projections and statistical analyses have allowed teachers to set targets. In January and February 2002 the data was used to contact parents and guardians to highlight 'stars and coasters'.

Key issues for 2001/02

Enhanced ethos

There is a need to reintroduce some of the values to do with expectations and respect for each other and the building. In addition, the following bullet points outline our desire for an enhanced ethos:

- ensure that students fully utilise their study periods
- enhance students' time management skills
- develop a culture of autonomous researching
- establish good practice in internet research.

Enrichment

Our view is that, as a result of Curriculum 2000, we have a very strong subject base. An area to enhance is enrichment. The aim is to ensure that during their time with us in the sixth form our students 'get rich' as a result of the vast number of extra activities we can offer. Again, this is a new development for the team that is under constant review. To complement the number of student committees that have been created (charity, sports, social and steering committees), a number of new activities have started. These include:

- Young Enterprise
- a Christmas pantomime
- a 'buddy night' – working with local groups of disabled people on their late-night Christmas shopping.

We have also linked up with a new private sector fitness club – Moreton Hall Fitness Club in Bury St Edmunds. On a Wednesday afternoon coach loads of our sixth formers visit the fitness club to use the swimming pool, the gym and to play squash. Students greatly value this opportunity and are encouraged to view it as a reward for working hard on academic studies.

External assessment

A number of our Year 13 students wished to continue with their current A2 studies and resit a number of AS-level modules in January 2002. This highlighted the need to plan revision time carefully and to focus on the skills required to be successful at a variety of external assessment methods.

Teaching styles and assessment

Our Year 12 students do not arrive as autonomous learners – they need to be supported and guided to develop the necessary research and learning skills for their new subjects.

Currently all AS-level, A-level and vocational A-level subjects receive 6 x 50 minutes of allocated time per week. Many of the lessons retain the 'traditional' A-level style. To help students learn how to be successful in aspects of research and coursework, a potential development is to have one of the six lessons per week in the style of a tutorial. During this tutorial one-to-one conversations would take place on research methods and target setting, thus aiming to develop a fuller background of the subjects to be studied.

Changes made at Thurston Community College in September 2001

- restricting the sixth form team so that it now includes:
  - head of sixth form
  - head of Year 12
  - head of Year 13
  - full-time administration support
- continuation of six lessons per AS subject but with the potential of one period being for a seminar or tutorial period
- review of sixth form ethos. Continued reintroduction of the basics and focus on enhanced time management skills. Sixth form students to earn privileges for signing out, etc
- greater enrichment opportunities. Continued links with private providers of recreational activities
- tutor period. Structured activities for morning and afternoon registration, eg UCAS
- new blocking systems to base Year 11 options more on career paths. Students to decide on three subject blocks that they will study for 2 years and a fourth block to pick a subject as only an AS subject for 1 year. In Year 13, as a result of the new blocking system, this fourth block will 'come alive' again so a new AS subject could be studied. This will be an option block open to both Year 12 and Year 13 students.

Proposed future developments

- There are exciting new changes taking place at our sixth form. The biggest change will be the £2m state-of-the-art building. The facilities will include 12 new class-teaching spaces, a cyber café, a multimedia learning suite, a large new space for assemblies and performances, social areas and a community library.
- As part of our ongoing review, and having listened to our students, new courses in ICT will need to be developed across all ability levels.
- Continued marketing and recruitment activities are needed during the academic year to ensure the 'trickle' effect.

Learner profiles

As part of its initial research into Curriculum 2000 LSDA asked schools and colleges to provide learner profiles to demonstrate what actual students were studying in 2000/01 – the first year of Curriculum 2000. This year, the institutions kindly provided further information about the progress of these learners and their programmes of study in year two.

For *Curriculum 2000+2* the updated learner profiles have been supplemented by focus groups of students from six institutions, who shared their original intentions in terms of programmes of study, actual progress and programmes taken in year two with LSDA consultants.

Analysis of the learner profiles and focus group discussions raises a number of interesting points.

- In the majority of cases schools, colleges and students have responded well to the broader curriculum offer. Choices not previously available have been on offer and students have chosen a variety of combinations.
- Often choices have been in complementary subjects. For example, combining vocational A-level Health and Social Care with AS level Biology, or vocational A-level Science with AS level Geography.
- A smaller number of students, but noticeable in the majority of institutions, have chosen contrasting subjects. For example, vocational A-level Business with AS level Chemistry, or AS level Biology with AS level History.
- The opportunity to take mixed programmes has been far more popular with vocational students. These students have taken a wide variety of AS/A2 awards alongside their vocational award. This is clearly demonstrated in the learner profiles.
- Academic students have tended to remain within the academic curriculum offer. They often take four AS levels in year one and move onto three A2 awards in year two. There is no single factor that students use to determine which AS level to drop. Some students base their decision on grade, others on interest in the subject.
- In a number of instances students on vocational A-level programmes dropped additional AS subjects in the first few months of study. Further investigation reveals that in many instances this was due to the demands of the vocational A-level programme, not the AS level. This may be due to the fact that vocational students presently have no transition from GCSE to A2 study. QCA recommends in its review of Curriculum 2000 (December 2001) that the vocational A-level should have an AS and A2 structure.

In analysing and commenting on student achievement it should be remembered that the full picture will not be available until summer 2002, once the first 2-year cohort of Curriculum 2000 students have completed their programmes.

Further learner profiles can be found on LSDA's website at www.LSDA.org.uk

School

Thurston Community College

Student	Year 1 programme and progress	Year 2 programme	Enrichment
1	□ Vocational A-level Science □ AS level Geography	□ Continuing vocational A-level Science □ A2 Geography	□ Young Enterprise
2	□ AS level English Literature □ AS level Geography □ AS level History	□ A2 English Literature □ A2 Geography □ A2 History	□ Football
3	□ Vocational A-level Business (E) □ AS level Art □ AS level English Language □ AS level Geography	□ A2 Art □ A2 English Language □ A2 Geography	□ Hockey and life drawing classes
4	□ Vocational A-level □ Leisure and Recreation □ AS level PE	□ Continuing vocational A-level Leisure and Recreation □ A2 PE	□ Hockey and an active member of sixth form committees
5	□ AS level Communication Studies □ AS level French (dropped December 2000) □ AS level Geography □ AS level Maths	□ A2 Communication Studies □ A2 Geography □ A2 Maths	□ Music, sport and mentoring scheme
6	□ Vocational A-level Business □ AS level Biology □ AS level Chemistry	□ Continuing vocational A-level Business □ A2 Biology □ A2 Chemistry	□ None
7	□ Vocational A-level Business □ AS level Chemistry (U) □ AS level English Language □ AS level Geography	□ Continuing vocational A-level Business □ A2 English Language □ A2 Geography	□ None
8	□ AS level Drama □ AS level English Language □ AS level History □ AS level Maths	□ A2 Drama □ A2 English Language □ A2 History □ A2 Maths	□ Duke of Edinburgh award and Young Enterprise
9	□ Vocational A-level Business □ AS level Chemistry (dropped 2001) □ AS level Textiles	□ Continuing vocational A-level Business □ A2 Textiles	□ Voluntary work
10	□ AS level Art □ AS level Communication Studies (dropped 2001) □ AS level Drama □ AS level English Literature	□ A2 Art □ A2 Drama □ A2 English Literature	□ Voluntary work
11	□ AS level English Language (C) □ AS level Geography □ AS level Government and Politics □ AS level History	□ A2 Geography □ A2 Government and Politics □ A2 History	□ Music

Sixth form colleges

Huddersfield New College

Student	Year 1 programme and progress	Year 2 programme	Enrichment
1	□ AS level English Literature (C) □ AS level General Studies (E) □ AS level History (left December 2000) □ AS level Media Studies (D) □ AS level Psychology (D) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ A2 English Literature □ A2 Media □ A2 Psychology □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Tutorial and enrichment programme, journalism and netball
2	□ Vocational A-level Health and Social Care – 12 units □ AS level Art (A) □ AS level English Literature (E) □ AS level General Studies (U) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Left college in October 2001	□ Tutorial and enrichment programme, and community service
3	□ Vocational A-level Business – 6 units (E for 3-unit award) □ Vocational A-level Engineering – 6 units (U) □ AS level Chemistry (D) □ AS level General Studies (E) □ AS level Physics (U) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ A2 Chemistry □ A2 Engineering □ A2 Physics □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Tutorial and enrichment programme, Maths for Scientists and Young Enterprise

John Leggott Sixth Form College

Student	Year 1 programme and progress	Year 2 programme	Enrichment
1	□ Vocational A-level Health and Social Care □ AS level Biology (E) □ GCSE Maths (November 2000 retake, gained C) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Continuing vocational A-level Health and Social Care □ A-level General Studies □ AS level Psychology □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Tutorial and enrichment programme, and first aid (passed first aid exam)
2	□ Vocational A-level Performing Arts – 12 units □ AS level English Language and Literature (D) □ AS level Geography (changed to AS level Sociology in October 2000, gained U) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Continuing vocational A-level Performing Arts □ A2 English Language and Literature □ AS level Media Studies □ AS level Film Studies □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Tutorial and enrichment programme, and holiday Spanish
3	□ Vocational A-level Leisure and Tourism – 12 units □ AS level Business (U) □ GCSE Maths (C) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Continuing vocational A-level Leisure and Tourism □ A-level General Studies □ AS level ICT □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Tutorial and enrichment programme, and advanced internet

FE college

Exeter College

Student	Year 1 programme and progress	Year 2 programme	Enrichment
1	□ Vocational A-level Business – 12 units □ AS level Accountancy (changed to AS level English Literature, grade U) □ AS level Maths (U) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Continuing vocational A-level Business – 12 units □ Restarting AS level Accountancy □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Key Skills and tutorial programme
2	□ Vocational A-level Art and Design – 12 units □ GCSE English (not entered) □ GCSE Maths (not entered) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Continuing vocational A-level Art and Design – 12 units □ AS level Film and Video □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Key Skills and tutorial programme
3	□ Vocational A-level Health and Social Care – 12 units □ AS level Human Biology (U) □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Continuing vocational A-level Health and Social Care – 12 units □ AS level Psychology □ Key Skills Qualification	□ Key Skills and tutorial programme

Student focus groups

LSDA consultants met groups of 6–10 students at the following institutions in March and November 2001:

- Cambridge Regional College
- Guildford College
- John Bunyan Upper School, Bedford
- John Ruskin College, Croydon
- Long Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge
- Thurston Community College, Bury St Edmunds.

During the November visit, students were asked to reflect on their first year of Curriculum 2000 studies.

Findings

General issues related to Curriculum 2000

Students were generally satisfied with their experiences of Curriculum 2000. Some commented that they had '...got used to what you have to do to pass the course'. A number of students noted that they didn't have to pass everything and that they could 'make up' for poorer performances earlier in their programme. Some students felt that their first year had been a bit 'rushed' and 'disorganised'. They wished they had been given more explanation of the requirements of their programmes. Clashes in the timetable were often raised and how they inhibited the choice of programme. The students at one institution were particularly concerned that the awarding bodies hadn't kept them informed or returned their work.

The phrase 'guinea pig' was used during almost every discussion. The students believed that, yet again, they had taken part in an experiment and that students entering Year 12 in September 2002 would benefit. They were very supportive of their teachers and demonstrated, on several occasions, sympathy with their teachers.

The differences in the standards between the vocational A-level and AS level were a concern to a number of students – the AS level was seen as 'easier'. Some students commented that they weren't even sure if their teachers knew what standard was required. The vocational A-level was frequently cited as requiring more work, examinations and unit assessments. The students said that they should have been given more information before the assessments. They viewed seeking information as an extra burden.

Approaches to tutoring

At a number of institutions, students had dropped subjects or left. As a result, some tutor groups had been joined together to make them more viable. The students liked this as it gave them an opportunity to get to know more of their peers. However, some students didn't see the benefits of tutorials; they didn't attend them and didn't feel that they had lost anything by not attending. Equally, other students spoke very highly of their tutors and their tutorial programme.

In all cases, tutoring in year two was focused on gaining entry to university. Some students who didn't intend to progress to higher education felt they were losing out, although one institution reported that students who planned to seek employment would receive much more individual attention after December 2001.

At one institution less time was set aside for tutoring in the second year and this was seen to be 'much better'. Tutorials also took place at different times of the day, whereas in the first year they were held at the end of the day for everybody. Students found one-to-one tutorials most useful.

Approaches to enrichment

The six institutions took significantly different approaches to enrichment. For some students enrichment activities were compulsory; other students were unaware of any enrichment activities. One school ran enrichment activities through the student council. It had raised money for BBC's Children in Need and this received praise from students. In one institution PE was removed from the timetable, but it was reinstated when students complained.

Students reported that they wanted 'fun things to do'. One institution delivered enrichment activities within year groups in year one. For 2001/02 it brought in a general programme for both year one and year two students. Students preferred this mixed approach. One student said '...it makes sixth-form life more productive'.

Approaches to dropping subjects

The vast majority of students had stayed on their chosen programme, although some students dropped subjects during the first year of their studies. One student had 'missed too much' due to illness.

Some students reported confusion over the number of subjects they should be doing in years one and two, and some considered that they had taken on greater workloads than they should have done. Several institutions required students to undertake a programme of four AS levels or equivalent in year one. A student from one institution reported that she was going to leave and go to another institution unless she was allowed to drop a subject. The student was allowed to drop an AS-level subject. At another institution, if students were younger than 18 years of age, they needed to fill in a form and get their parents' or guardians' signatures before they were allowed to drop a subject.

Students reported that too much was crammed into the AS specifications for a 1-year programme, or they said that they needed more support in preparing for the workload, particularly in building the skills of independent learning.

Most students dropped subjects at the end of their first year. The reasons given for dropping subjects were all to do with a lack of 'enjoyment' or 'poor grades'. A significant number of students reported that they had taken up new AS-level subjects in their second year of Curriculum 2000.

Experiences of external assessment

Students generally supported unit assessments, with a number reporting that they had already got a qualification from their first-year AS levels and three- or six-unit vocational A-level.

Where institutions had spent time explaining the grading systems of the qualifications students said that they knew what grade they wanted to aim for and what they needed to do to achieve it. At one institution the group noted that the level of 'hardness' of the work varied from student to student depending on their achievements in year one. There were differences in opinion over the level of the vocational A-level tests. Some students 'liked' units being all at the same level throughout the 2 years, others would have preferred an AS-type level in year one.

Students at some institutions wanted more knowledge of how the assessment results were converted into an overall grade. Often there was anxiety over external examinations and how they could affect grades. Students wanted to use the January test series to resit examinations but they requested more guidance on how to make resit choices.

One institution decided to enter every vocational A-level student following a certain subject for all the assessed units in year one, using the opportunity for resits in January 2002. Students were not so happy with this approach in year one but more supportive in year two. Students from another institution, which had only used the June examinations, felt that the year's assessments should have been spread throughout the year. They described the end of the course as 'rushed'.

Students preferred both the January and June test dates to be used for examinations. They reported that this enabled them to get a more individualised examination timetable. One focus group argued that they '...should be allowed to take books into the examination'. Meanwhile, a number of students felt that some teachers 'taught more' than they needed to. There were some differences over preferred assessment activities with students reporting that they sat AS-level exams all day during the summer examination period. In one focus group the students spoke about having 'loads of revision' although the 'teachers prepared us well'.

What happened in June and July after the examinations?

Students from one institution reported minimal work being set over the summer break. In another institution some students used the holidays to complete unfinished work in year one, while others made the most of their 'free' time to earn money. Nevertheless, students felt that the 12-week break 'was too long'.

A2 courses were started early in some institutions – 'that was quite good'. One institution asked students to return with the intention of starting the A2, but that didn't happen and they were left feeling that the time wasn't used effectively. A similar model in one of the colleges was considered 'unfair' by students as they 'had to keep doing subjects even if you intended to drop them'.

The following comments were made by some of the students as they explained what happened after the June examinations.

Went on holiday

Finished off units

No point in starting A2

Not everyone came back – some started A2s, many didn't

Some subjects did coursework, some didn't.

Approaches to cashing in

Cashing in was not an issue for any of the students in one focus group. Another group of students reported that they were getting mixed messages – there was confusion over whether to decline grades or otherwise. The teacher declined the grades for the whole class in one instance. A number of students were retaking some subjects in order to improve their grades.

It was very confusing – whether to 'accept' or to 'decline' – no one seemed to know.

One institution advised students not to cash in unless they intended to drop the subject.

Approaches to progression from year one to year two

In general, AS-level results influenced students' A2 choices in all institutions. Decisions about what to study in Year 13 were made in September. In one institution students were asked in June to indicate what subjects they wanted to continue but were advised to tick everything and decide upon receipt of their results. One student described the process as 'put down what you want to do next year ... if you pass, you're back ... if you don't, you go'. Students from another institution said that decisions were made in an interview with the head of year – a 2-minute discussion in some instances. Students felt that there was an inconsistent approach and reported that the work was more intensive in year two.

Applying to higher education and experiences of UCAS

The application process was described as 'sluggish' by one participant but 'rushed' by another. Students referred to both online and paper applications. Most institutions required students to take a paper-based approach, but in one of the institutions all students applied to UCAS online. Only one institution encouraged the students to choose their own preferred method. A number of students reported that there was a need for guidance for those students who didn't know which method to use. Help was also required with the form and its 'confusing layout'.

All students said that the UCAS points were confusing as there was no consistent approach from the universities.

Approaches to Key Skills

The variety of student responses reflected the different approaches adopted by the six institutions. Some students were working towards Level 4 in IT; others were doing no Key Skills work at all. One student reported that he had got 'no interest in Key Skills' since he'd visited universities. Some concern was expressed that Key Skills were 'bolted on' to students' existing programmes, although they had been told that the qualifications would help them with their studies. A number of students felt they had been taught maths and English rather than Application of Number and Communication.

Other comments included:

I was the only person to turn up for one lesson.

I just thought Key Skills should be optional.

Nobody wants to do them.

There was little evidence of students doing the wider Key Skills. The students at one institution were confused about what they were doing – was it personal and social education (PSE), AS level General Studies, the main Key Skills or the wider Key Skills? Key Skills delivery was a contentious issue. Vocational A-level students thought it very unfair that AS-level students achieved Key Skills through AS level General Studies and subsequently got another qualification.

Some students, however, saw the benefits of Key Skills and wanted greater emphasis placed upon them.

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Tait T, Frankland G, Moore S and Smith D. *Curriculum 2000: innovations, opportunity and change*. LSDA, February 2002.

Curriculum 2000 – 2 tracks the experiences of institutions and learners in the 18 months since the Qualifying for Success reforms were introduced. Through a series of case studies, schools, sixth form and FE colleges describe the issues they faced in implementing Curriculum 2000 in years one and two and how they tackled them.

Topics covered include Key Skills, progression, raising achievement, the examination process and assessment. The book also includes a summary of comments made by Curriculum 2000 students who participated in LSDA focus groups and a discussion of how the reforms will shape institutions' work in the future.

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